JMETL:
The Key to Joint Proficiency

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Modern warfare is joint warfare. Therefore the Armed Forces must train jointly in order to fight successfully. Unfortunately, today we face resource constraints that make it no longer possible to train each task to proficiency. The joint community, like the services, must determine which tasks are necessary and warrant training. To get the most out of available resources, objectives must be derived by assessing probable future operations. The joint community lacked the means to do that in the past; now the joint mission essential task list (JMETL) can make training more efficient in ensuring success.

As U.S. forces operate in a world of diverging threats and growing fiscal constraints, it is critical that training systems use the most effective requirements-based methods available. The full implementation of a joint training system rooted in joint mission essential tasks (JMETs) can make this possible. This article looks at including JMETs in training and readiness systems to improve joint proficiency in specific mission areas.

Background

JMETs benefitted from the Army experience in developing unit mission essential task lists (METLs). While there are important differences between them, METL provides a foundation for JMETs.[1] The Army training model begins by assessing all the tasks that a unit may ever perform. A unit reviews its mission statement entered on the modified table of organization and equipment, any operation plans or orders against which it is force listed, guidance from higher headquarters, and Army publications. The assessment leads to a list of all possible tasks for a given unit.

Lists may be long, as in the case of a combat arms unit such as an armor battalion, or short for specialized units, as with a postal detachment. For most units this initial list has more tasks than they can effectively train to given time limitations, much less fiscal constraints. Since there are some tasks to which units will be unable to train, let alone train to standard,[2] commanders must prioritize the list to select tasks which must be trained. This is also accomplished by reviewing the references mentioned and selecting the most likely combat tasks. These then become the mission essential tasks for a unit.

Next is determining how well trained a unit is for the items on a METL. A standardized assessment tool is necessary. The Army uses written conditions and standards for each task as the assessment tool. Currently there are conditions and standards for most tasks required.[3] However, when the process began there were only limited published conditions and standards, and many of them varied from unit to unit.

The Army has an organization-wide process to standardize the names of tasks and related conditions and standards. This procedure will carry on in some form as conditions and standards shift with new information and technology. Conditions and standards become objective measures which a unit uses to assess when it is sufficiently trained for a task and can move on to others.

Assessments result in selecting tasks that units should include in their next training period. In theory units do not prioritize tasks on their METL. All should be of equal importance or not be on the list, since supposedly essential tasks should be trained to standard all the time. However, time, money, and unit priority make it difficult if not

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SH–60 picking up survivors of simulated crash.

U.S. Air Force (Sean Worrell)

impossible to train to standard on all METL tasks. Therefore units identify duties for which they are untrained or need practice as the focus of the next available training days. Unit proficiency in METL tasks should determine the requirement for training and form the basis of the unit training plan.

The Joint Process

The Army training model follows the precept that operational requirements should drive training. It ensues from the success of the Army process that joint operational requirements should also drive joint training. We should train the way we intend to fight in the joint environment just as we do in service-directed training. These precepts should be fundamental to every training plan.

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Unfortunately, this has not been the norm since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Too much of the joint training conducted in the last nine years has used imprecise training vehicles. Training driven by large-scale field exercises that are based on artificial scenarios and held without detailed analysis to identify the appropriate tactics, techniques, and procedures as objectives rarely optimized resources or yielded focused training. While such exercises had utility and did produce benefits, they were too costly and inefficient to remain the norm. More seriously, some training vehicles have become mere sounding boards for developing doctrinal theories, using personnel as training support for initiatives that research and development has failed to address. Such practices must be replaced with a process that targets training to produce increased readiness with every dollar spent.

Practice does not make perfect, only perfect practice makes perfect. This applies to joint forces as well as service component forces. For joint organizations to measure their readiness they need to know what missions and tasks they will most likely perform in combat and in operations other than war. Then they need to know the standards for performance of these tasks and under what conditions they must execute them. Such a knowledge set provides the tasks, conditions, and standards for the joint force METL. Effective training requires these parameters to give commanders objective measurements against which to apply themselves. This knowledge set will also give the joint forces a plan to allocate resources to achieve desired readiness levels. Instead of conducting large-scale, expensive exercises, the joint force commander needs to conduct focused training to assess the proficiency of his forces to conduct the tasks they will be required to perform in combat. With this assessment the commander can create a training plan to move the unit toward proficiency. This type of training requires standardized tasks, conditions, and standards at the joint level.

In the past most joint forces have been formed in an ad hoc manner. Despite this, key personnel in potential joint force headquarters have intuitively known what tasks were critical to mission accomplishment. In each case they have identified many of these tasks and set about accomplishing them, for the most part without direct guidance or assistance; but they could have been more effective had these tasks been identified in advance. It is time for the joint community to routinely publish task lists (JMETL) as well as the conditions and standards that go with each duty. Sufficient information is available to formulate conditions and standards for all joint forces from the lessons of former large exercises, after action reviews (AARs) on recent joint operations (such as Somalia and Haiti), and experiences of current CINCs and their staffs.

Ongoing Improvements

Deducing the essential from a list of all possible tasks for joint forces or units operating in a joint environment is the logical starting point for determining force JMETLs. Unfortunately, such a list does not exist. Analyzing the joint strategic capabilities plan (JSCP) and the complete file of operations plans is the best way to develop a list. This takes time and thought from key operations and plans personnel, but the resources to accomplish it are in place.

Navy and Air Force aircraft during Roving Sands '94.

Combat Camera Imagery (Delanie Stafford)

The joint community has identified universal joint tasks to support training and listed them in the universal joint task list (UJTL). Originally many were disenchanted because UJTL appeared to approach the requirements-based training from the wrong perspective, and its terminology was generic and lacked current joint usage. Also, there was not enough input from warfighting CINCs and too much work had been contracted; thus, the document was out of touch with techniques. Acceptance of the first UJTL version was also hampered by a lack of understanding of the process and potential uses. By the time most officers began to read about its operational tasks in section II, they had already lost confidence in the document.

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Fortunately, significant improvement has been made in 1995, incorporating the best of the entire joint community. The result is an improved UJTL, version 2.1, which reorganizes the tasks to fit joint doctrine and reflects the input of all unified commands. The new UJTL can and should empower the requirements-based system of the future.

Beyond UJTL, precise tasks must drive the joint training program. But the program must also reflect warfighting priorities to maximize readiness in a period of resource reductions. Among these goals are:

■ *Matching specific tasks to specific audiences*. While multi-echeloned training is possible, the joint community no longer has resources to conduct it worldwide. Training events must aim at a particular level of joint training and at the units or staffs which must execute the missions that the training supports. This is the core of the U.S. Atlantic Command (ACOM) training program.

■ *Avoiding duplicating training accomplished at service component level*. The services are capable of producing trained, interoperable units, and conducting interoperability training. Service training can support joint requirements, and when conducted and assessed, service exercises should form a large portion of the joint readiness system. The only thing lacking is a means to account for joint tasks accomplished in service training. While these two tenets may lead one to rely heavily on simulation and modeling to train higher level joint organizations, nothing beats the real thing. It is still productive to shake out an entire joint organization when the mission and force readiness levels warrant, even at considerable cost.

■ *Avoiding interference in service training*. The services must stay proficient in required tasks as a foundation for joint training and operations. Likewise, service training must not be used as an excuse for not conducting joint training. A balance must be struck since both are essential.

■ *Orienting only on essential tasks*. In a resource-constrained environment we cannot train to tasks that we do not intend to perform in contingencies and combat. Exercises and other training events that do not

directly contribute to readiness requirements must be deleted from joint training. The prioritization of exercises and training must begin with a JMETL for supported commanders. JFCs must weed out adventure training and roll all resources into mission-required training.

Completing the Process

The first step toward solving this problem has been the development of militarily precise joint tasks that bridge the full spectrum of warfighting from strategic through tactical levels. This started with a simple mission analysis of tasks identified in the JSCP for each warfighting CINC. Then theater staffs applied their in-depth knowledge of the culture, history, and geography of their areas of operations to identify essential capabilities. Many essential tasks are not joint, and many joint techniques and procedures will not be essential to a specific geographical area.

Since JSCP taskings have been used to identify strategic tasks at theater level, operations plans (OPLANs) can be used to define area of responsibility (AOR)-specific operational and even tactical tasks required by a CINC's theater strategy. Each theater has its own force requirements and operational tasks reflected in OPLANs. Such plans are continually updated to reflect methods required to obtain a CINC's objectives. In most cases specific essential tasks can be identified. These tasks can become JMETs for forces assigned in the individual OPLANs.

UJTL can then serve as the menu to form subordinate force JMETLs for designated joint force commanders. The list of JMETs for an AOR should reflect plans that are critical to a regional strategy and reference joint tactics, techniques, and procedures that have proven successful.

Even with sound JMETs, most joint trainers must significantly reorient their instruction to maximize its effect on a specific audience. This means that command post or computer assisted exercises are the best way to train for strategic and operational tasks. Field training exercises are good vehicles for accomplishing certain tasks, but they are wasteful if used to practice strategic or operational planning tasks. Though computer technology may appear expensive, its use over the long term is much more economical and precise than deploying large numbers of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to act out "big blue arrows."

Once essential tasks are identified and training is redesigned for the appropriate audiences, the final step is to develop supporting conditions and standards to measure and standardize training effectiveness. Conditions and standards make objective feedback possible, and that completes the process by returning results and lessons learned into the design stage of training development that strengthens weak areas and incorporates capabilities into future employment planning.

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Challenges Overcome

The volume of possible joint tasks makes the development of JMETs a challenge, although the scope of concurrence needed to fully implement the program was expected to be the greatest obstacle. Not only did the different theater CINCs have to reach consensus on what tasks are truly joint, but the services had to agree to train these joint tasks in addition to their own service METL. Both challenges have been met and the Navy and the Air Force have even started to design service METLs to support the joint system.

Almost as challenging was bridging the language barrier that plagues many joint projects. Even if various staffs agree on what is fundamentally joint and essential, producing plain language descriptors at all levels to account for service culture, capabilities, and techniques while reflecting joint doctrine will be an awesome task.

Finally, the support of the Chairman and the joint force integrator mission of ACOM have greatly facilitated institutionalizing JMETL among theater staffs and service components. Although some were skeptical of the ACOM role, practice and limits on resources outside CONUS validate the need for JFCs to achieve joint integration in the United States before their forces deploy. The Chairman has made JMETL development a priority, and this focus has been strongly supported by the services and CINCs. The design and development of the required tools to begin requirements-based training is complete. All that remains is to educate personnel at all levels on the benefits of the system and complete the honing of the joint exercise program.

Joint training in the next century will be requirements-based. This will generate a process for defining and standardizing essential tasks so that limited resources are allocated based on need. Perceived trends will eventually provide commanders with a basic tool to assess joint readiness. In turn, JMETs will impact on training, focusing efforts more on tasks and forces requiring specific training emphasis. This will have a positive effect on battle space proficiency of joint forces.

JMET development is vital to improving joint training and readiness and should be widely discussed. Training funds are becoming the sole discretionary resource. Their efficient use will be critical to the readiness of forces whose proficiency will be essential to victory in the battle space. The Armed Forces need a means of assessing joint proficiency and plan training. Fully developed JMETLs, with associated conditions and standards as discussed here, are the right tool and the best path today for joint training. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] See FM 25-100, *Training the Force,* and FM 25-101, *Battle-Focused Training.*

[2] In the Army system the *standard* for a task is frequently a specific goal (such as the time required to complete a road march), whereas under the joint system the standard may be described in terms of a measure of mission accomplishment.

[3] The Army is still refining the process of conditions and standards. See H. Hugh Shelton and Steven C. Sifers, "Standardized Training Assessment," *Military Review*, vol. 74, no. 10 (October 1994), p. 5.